
CIRM Leadership

Maria T. Millan, President and CEO



Maria Millan is the President and CEO of CIRM. Joining the Agency in December 2012, Maria was the Medical Officer for two of CIRM's early first- in-human clinical trials and led the formation of the Alpha Stem Cell Clinics Network which, within a year of launch, actively supports over 20 clinical trials. Maria led the development of CIRM's strategic clinical and translational infrastructure programs, the Accelerating Center (stem cell focused clinical research organization), the Translating Center (stem cell focused preclinical research organization) and the ATP3 Public Private Partnership, all designed to markedly accelerate stem cell therapeutic development. Before serving as President, Maria was Vice President of CIRM's Therapeutics group. This group identifies promising clinical stage stem cell projects for partnership with CIRM and, along with top tier advisors and key opinion leaders, works with investigators to accelerate therapeutic development for patients with unmet medical needs.

Beginning her career as an academic transplant surgeon and researcher, Maria has continued to focus on driving innovative solutions for improving treatment options and outcomes for patients with life threatening conditions. She received her general surgery training and transplant immunology postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard Medical School- Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, was trained in transplant at Stanford University School of Medicine and served as Associate Professor of Surgery and Director of the Pediatric Organ Transplant Program at Stanford. She has served on multiple leadership committees, including the Stanford Medical School Faculty Senate, faculty search and retention committees, Lucile Packard Children's Hospital operations committee, the American Society for Transplantation's Vanguard Committee and the ISSCR Clinical Translation Committee. She is a former Vice President and acting Chief Medical Officer for StemCells, Inc. where she oversaw the launch of the company's first clinical trial for a rare and fatal pediatric CNS condition and served as the Head of the company's Liver Program.

Jonathan Thomas, Chairman, Independent Citizens' Oversight Committee (ICOC)



Jon Thomas is a Co-Founding Partner at Saybrook Capital ("Saybrook"), an investment banking and private equity firm based in Santa Monica, California.

Long interested in the biological sciences, Thomas majored in Biology and History at Yale, where he graduated summa cum laude. As a George C. Marshall Scholar at Oxford, he then earned a PhD with a medical focus in Commonwealth History. He subsequently returned to Yale for a JD at the Yale Law School. While there, Thomas retained an involvement with biology by teaching courses on the legal implications of genetic engineering and the impact of disease on history.

Thomas has a long-standing commitment to patient advocacy. He spent more than 15 years on the Board of the Crippled Children's Society of Southern California and served as chair for four years. The organization, now called AbilityFirst, assists children with spinal cord injuries and mental disabilities that could be targets of stem cell therapies. Thomas is an Honorary member of the AbilityFirst Board.

[See his full bio here](#)

Senator Art Torres (Ret.), Vice-Chair





Senator Art Torres (Ret.) was unanimously elected statutory Vice Chair of the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee, the governing Board of the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine (CIRM). He is a colon cancer and osteoarthritis survivor.

Between 1996 and 2009, Torres served as the Chair of the California Democratic Party. He previously served twenty years in the California Legislature, eight as a member of the State Assembly and twelve as a State Senator. Torres chaired the Senate Insurance Committee, Senate Toxics Committee, the Assembly Health Committee, and the Senate Joint Committee on Science and Technology.

He is currently on the Board and Vice Chairman of "One Legacy," an organ transplant foundation in the US headquartered in Los Angeles.

He was recently appointed by the California State Senate to the five member board of Covered California which oversees Obamacare in California. He also serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of the UC Santa Cruz Foundation.

Senator Torres authored the California Clean Water Drinking Act, Proposition 65, and created the sole toxic reporting repository that helps scientists determine environmental and health impacts "a data source that really no one else has on the planet." On November 18th, 2010 he was sworn in by then Mayor Gavin Newsom, to a four year term on San Francisco's Public Utilities Commission and later elected as its President before stepping down.

Senator Torres holds a Bachelor's Degree from UC Santa Cruz and a Juris Doctorate degree from UC Davis School of Law. He also served as a John F. Kennedy teaching fellow at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

He previously served as a German Marshall Fund Fellow and was recently appointed as the University of San Francisco Diversity Scholar Visiting Professor.

[See his full bio here](#)

Maria Bonneville, Vice President of Administration, Executive Director to the CIRM Governing Board



Maria Bonneville is the Vice President of Administration and the Executive Director to the Governing Board (ICOC) at CIRM and has been with the agency since 2011. Maria is in charge of a team with a wide range of skills but a common goal; this includes Communications, Information Technology, Human Resources and Board Relations. She works directly with the CIRM Board to advance CIRM's mission, helping lead the development and coordination of Board policies and procedures. She also works with California state legislators and staff members to keep the public up to date on the full scope of CIRM's activities.

Before joining CIRM, Maria was the Special Assistant to former Treasurer Bill Lockyer at the California State Treasurer's office where she

represented the Treasurer in state business matters with the state and local government and the business community in the Bay Area. She was also the Northern California Finance Director for the Lockyer Committee and was responsible for fundraising programs for the re-election of California Attorney General Bill Lockyer for Treasurer. Maria also has extensive experience with product development, product marketing, E-commerce, and public relations.

She received a Bachelor of Arts in political sciences from the University of California Berkeley.

Abla Creasey, Senior Director of Strategic Clinical, Regulatory, and Infrastructure Programs



Abla oversees CIRM's Strategic Infrastructure (the Alpha Clinics Network, the Accelerating Center and Translating Center and CIRM's basic research infrastructure-genomics and iPSC programs) and CIRM's Clinical Advisory Panel. Previously at CIRM, Dr. Creasey helped the Therapeutics Team achieve the bold goal of bringing in 10 new clinical trials in Year 1 of CIRM's 5-year strategic plan. She has exemplified the "All In" attitude that drives success for the team and for CIRM towards its mission of accelerating stem cell treatment to patients with unmet medical needs.

Abla has broad and extensive experience in science, technology, and pharmaceutical product development. Prior to joining CIRM in 2016, she was at Johnson & Johnson for 12 years. While at Johnson and Johnson, Abla was a Senior Scientific Director in Pharmaceutical Development & Manufacturing Sciences at Janssen and prior to that, she was, an Executive Director, heading drug delivery, pharmacology, analytical characterization, clinical & quality at Advanced Technologies & Regenerative Medicine (ATRM), another J&J company. Prior to ATRM, Abla was Vice President of Biological Sciences at ALZA Corporation, where she headed discovery efforts in formulation, preclinical and oral drug delivery. Before joining ALZA in 2004, Abla held senior-level positions in R&D, clinical development, and regulatory affairs within the biotechnology industry including Chiron Corporation and Cetus Corporation.

Abla received a B.S. in biology from the College of Notre Dame in Belmont California, and earned her Ph.D. in medical microbiology from the University of California, Berkeley. She completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the Stanford University School of Medicine in infectious disease, biochemistry, and immunology.

Neil J. Littman, Director of Business Development and Therapeutics Team Operations



Neil Littman is the Director of Business Development and Therapeutics Team Operations at CIRM. Neil is responsible for the development of platforms and best practices that increase industry and investor engagement and that further promote the visibility of CIRM's funding opportunities and of its development and therapeutics portfolio.

Neil is responsible for establishing and maintaining relationships with pharma and biotech companies, and investors. In the past, Neil was responsible for managing CIRM's strategic infrastructure programs, including the Alpha Clinics, Accelerating Center, Translating Center, iPSC Bank, Stem Cell Genomics Center of Excellence, and CIRM's new \$150 million Accelerating Therapies Public-Private Partnership.

Prior to joining CIRM in 2012, Neil was a Senior Associate at Burrill & Company, a life sciences venture capital firm and investment bank with over \$1 billion of assets under management. Prior to joining Burrill & Company in 2009, Neil worked in the Healthcare Investment Banking groups at Thomas Weisel Partners and Deutsche Bank where he focused on strategic advisory and public and private financings, including: M&A, in-licensing, out-licensing, IPOs, follow-ons, registered directs, and private placements.

Neil received a Master of Science in Biotechnology with a concentration in Biotechnology Enterprise from The Johns Hopkins University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Molecular, Cellular and Development Biology from the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Patricia Olson, Vice President of Discovery and Translation



Patricia Olson, Ph.D., serves as the Vice President, Discovery & Translation, at the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM) responsible for the development, implementation and outcomes of CIRM's Discovery and Translation funding programs. Previously, she served in a variety of positions at CIRM including Executive Director, Scientific Affairs, responsible for the development, review, implementation and management of CIRM's research funding program.

Prior to joining CIRM, Dr. Olson served in a variety of positions at Chiron Corporation (now Novartis) including Vice President, Protein Therapeutics Research and Vice President, Portfolio Management and Strategic Planning, R&D. While at Chiron, she participated in the research and development of several products including two marketed products. She is an inventor on 22 issued U.S. patents and an author of 31 peer-reviewed publications and book chapters. Dr. Olson received her Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Biophysics from the University of California at Berkeley and her B.S. in Cellular Biology (magna cum laude) from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Gil Sambrano, Vice President of Portfolio Development and Review



Gil leads the team responsible for selecting the highest quality stem cell-based projects for CIRM funding from Discovery to Clinical programs. His team builds and cultivates a world class team of expert reviewers and directs a rigorous review process through the governing board-appointed Grants Working Group (GWG).

Gil joined CIRM in 2005 as the first Scientific Officer. During his tenure, Gil has contributed to building the vision of CIRM by leading and advancing the scientific review process, constructing grants administration policies, guiding early development of the Grants Management System, and managing the training grant programs. He has been a key point of contact to help applicants and grantees identify appropriate partnering opportunities and navigate the CIRM solicitation and application process. He leads the conduct of GWG review meetings and has been the primary liaison with patient advocate and scientific members of the GWG.

Prior to CIRM, he was an assistant professor in the department of Cellular and Molecular Pharmacology at UCSF. In 2001, Gil took on a notable position to coordinate efforts of the Alliance for Cellular Signaling, a multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary consortium of scientists led by the Nobel laureate, Alfred G. Gilman, whose goal is to understand the basic principles that regulate signal transduction in cells.

His scientific education includes a B.S. in biology from the University of Texas at El Paso and a Ph.D. in biomedical sciences from the University of California, San Diego. Gil trained as a postdoctoral fellow at the Cardiovascular Research Institute at the University of California San Francisco.

Chila Silva-Martin, Vice President of Finance



Chila Silva-Martin serves as the Vice President of Finance for the CIRM. In this capacity, she is responsible for managing CIRM's \$3 billion financial plan.

Chila came to CIRM with more than 30 years of California State service. During her career with the State, she served in several executive and senior management positions. Prior to joining CIRM, Chila served as the Chief of the State Personnel Board's Administrative Services and Consulting Divisions and the Deputy Director for Administration at the Department of Fair Employment and Housing.

Chila received a Bachelor of Science degree from the California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) in Business Administration, with an emphasis in strategic planning. In 2007, Chila received a certificate for participation in CSUS' Leadership for the Government Executive program.

Gabriel Thompson, Vice President of Grants and Operations



Gabriel Thompson is the Vice President of Grants and Operations at CIRM leading efforts to ensure the Institute's award and financial management processes are efficient, fair, predictable, consistent and most importantly, aligned with CIRM's mission to accelerate stem cell therapies to patients with unmet medical needs.

Gabe has worked in state and university research administration since 1998 and regenerative medicine specifically since 2007. Prior to CIRM, he worked at the UCSF Center for Reproductive Sciences as the Administrative Director helping oversee the doubling of the Center's research funding portfolio, recruiting 4 new faculty and renovating 6,000 sqft of wet laboratories in two years. He also worked for the University of Chicago as a Senior Budget Analyst for the Dean of the Division of Biological Sciences assisting, approving and monitoring 10 departments' annual budgets. Gabe received his Bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of Chicago and holds a MBA in Finance from Golden Gate University.

Scott Tocher, General Counsel



As General Counsel, Scott works with the President and CEO of CIRM, the Chairman, the Governing Board, and the entire CIRM team in developing strategies to implement CIRM's mission, drafting and reviewing agency policies, advising the agency on conflict of interest issues, and interfacing with stakeholders on matters of concern to the agency.

Scott joined the legal team at CIRM in 2005 and advised the agency in the formulation of many substantive policies, such as Grants Administration, Intellectual Property, and Medical and Ethical Standards, and ensured their successful adoption by the Office of Administrative Law.

Scott graduated from law school and practiced complex litigation and appellate work in Sacramento for three years following graduation in 1995. He left the private law firm to join the Fair Political Practices Commission as a legislative coordinator and eventually became a Senior Counsel to the Commission, representing the agency in federal and state courts and drafting Commission opinions and regulations, and presenting legal and policy matters to the Commission as well as legislative committees, agencies of the state and meetings of interested groups.

Scott graduated from CSU Sacramento with a degree in Government and earned his Juris Doctor with honors from McGeorge School of Law, where he was a member of both law reviews.

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